



The Big Blue Box Ltd

Stress - The Elephant In The Room

When we are under stress, our behaviours change, our intellectual functioning is lowered, we are less rational, less able to take on information, less able to learn, more likely to make mistakes.

The Background

N is a senior operational leader – the link between the client and the supplier, he has extensive resource, timescale and delivery responsibilities. He has had a typical career and life mix which has included having a family, redundancy, divorce and further marriage. N is well respected in his industry and ambitious to proceed. We met with a brief to work on N's soft skills, influencing, political awareness and emotional self control.

The Process

In our first meeting we discussed N's story so far and his forthcoming promotion interview.

'I've got some catching up to do in my career so I need to apply for this promotion... I needed to show good performance in my promotion panel.'

His business unit was accountable for a major share of the organisation's results. N had previously reported 'on track' performance and a Steering Group Review Meeting was taking place within the next few days. But the latest internal reports indicted a hole was opening up and 50% of targeted performance was at risk.

'I've have to be calm and reassuring to the guys in my team, I can't play hard ball.'

Was he covering up performance issues that his team could probably also see were increasing? Was his promotion opportunity clouding his judgement?

As other clues emerged, it very quickly became clear that all was not well, perhaps N was not facing the facts – or at least was seemingly unaware of any 'alternative interpretation'. There seemed to be no sense of urgency in N's response to 'the facts' – he seemed oblivious, his manner belied the apparent issues.

N's behaviour was clearly caused by stress, there was 'an elephant in the room' which he was denying existed.

Further sustained defences eventually yielded when N realised that his wife did not appear to be wholly supportive of his promotion application at this time.

This moment was hugely significant.

Immediately N's body language changed, he breathed out deeply and clearly relaxed.

Close to tears he took several moments to quietly reflect and consider. The privacy and confidentiality of the coaching conversation enabled him to recognise the stress that was affecting him.

He was now prepared to change his approach.

The Big Blue Box Ltd

Contact: 1 The Laurels, Oatlands Drive, Weybridge, Surrey. KT13 9LF

Tel: voice/fax: 01932 843933 www.thebigbluebox.co.uk

Registered Office: Suite 1, Concept House, 23 Billet Lane, Hornchurch, Essex, RM11 1XP

Registered in England No: 4401635

Stress - The Elephant In The Room

The Outcomes

This was our first meeting and our immediate priority now was to use the opportunity of the Review Meeting to 'come clean' and change direction.

We made a plan.

N sent the Steering Group a 'heads-up briefing' on the emerging performance issues.

N changed his approach with his teams and he spoke to his wife.

Following a revised approach to his promotion, whilst not immediately successful, the panel reported that his presentation had 'raised the bar'.

The consequences, had N not seen The Elephant, can only be imagined.